

US campaign behind the turmoil in K

Analysis
Ian Traynor

With their websites and stickers, their pranks and slogans aimed at banishing widespread fear of a corrupt regime, the democracy guerrillas of the Ukrainian Pora youth movement have already notched up a famous victory — whatever the outcome of the dangerous stand-off in Kiev.

Ukraine, traditionally passive in its politics, has been mobilised by the young democracy activists and will never be the same again.

But while the gains of the orange-bedecked "chestnut revolution" are Ukraine's, the campaign is an American creation, a sophisticated and blatantly conceived exercise in western branding and marketing that, in four years, has been used to try to salvage elections and topple corrupt regimes.

It was organised by government, deployment, consultants, pollsters, the two big parties and US government organisations. The campaign was first launched in Belgrade in 2000 at Slobodan Milosevic's ballot box. It was the US amb-

he repeated the trick in Georgia, coaching Mikhail Saakashvili in how to bring down Eduard Shevardnadze. Ten months after the success in Belgrade, the US ambassador in Minsk, Michael Kozak, a veteran of similar operations in central America, notably in Nicaragua, organised a near identical campaign to try to defeat the Belarus hardman, Alexander Lukashenko.

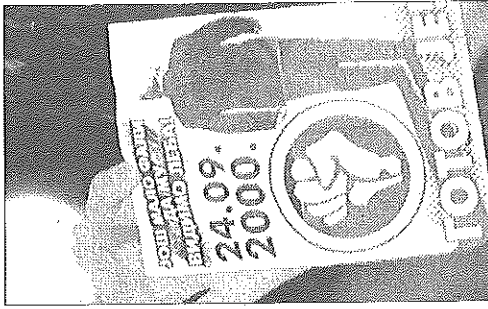
That one failed. "There will be no Kostunica in Belarus," the Belarus president declared, referring to the victory in Belgrade. But experience gained in Serbia, Georgia and Belarus has been invaluable in plotting to beat the regime of Leonid Kuchma in Kiev.

The operation — engineering democracy through the ballot box and civil disobedience — is now so slick that the methods have matured into a template for winning other people's elections. In the centre of Belgrade, there is a dingy office staffed by computer-literate youngsters who call themselves the Centre for Non-violent Resistance. If you want to know how to beat a regime that controls the mass media, the judges, the courts, the security apparatus and the voting stations, the young Belgrade activists are for hire.

They emerged from the anti-Milosevic student movement, Otpor, meaning resistance. The catchy, single-word branding is important. In Georgia last year, the party repeated the trick in Georgia, coaching Mikhail Saakashvili in how to bring down Eduard Shevardnadze. Ten months after the success in Belgrade, the US ambassador in Minsk, Michael Kozak, a veteran of similar operations in central America, notably in Nicaragua, organised a near identical campaign to try to defeat the Belarus hardman, Alexander Lukashenko.



Branding and use of unifying symbols in Ukraine (above), Serbia (top right) and Georgia Main photograph: Gleb Garanich/Reuters



use psephological plot strategy. The usually fractious have to be united behind a single candidate there is to be any chance of unseating the regime leader is selected on merit and objective even if he or she is an American.

In Serbia, US polls Penn, Schoen and Br Associates discovered the assassinated pro-opposition leader, Zvezdijic, was reviled and had no chance of Milosevic fairly in action. He was persuaded to take a back seat to the western Vojislav Kostunica who is now Serbian prime minister.

In Belarus, US officials ordered opposition parties to unite behind the elderly trade unionist Vladimir Goncharik, he appealed to much of the population. Officially, the US government spent \$41m (£22m) organising and funding a year-long operation to elect Milosevic from October 1999. In Ukraine, the said to be around \$14m.

Apart from the student movement and the union opposition, the other element in the democratic plate is what is known as "parallel vote tabulation" counter to the election rigging tricks beloved of corrupt regimes.

There are professional side election monitors bodies such as the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

The Democratic party's National Democratic Institute, the Republican party's International Republican Institute, the US state department and USAID are the main agencies involved in these grassroots campaigns as well as the Freedom House NGO and the billionaire George Soros's open society institute. Its pollsters and professors lead from Belgrade, Alaska.

young opposition leaders to the Baltic, where they met up with Serbs travelling from Belgrade. In Serbia's case, given the hostile environment in Belgrade, the Americans organised the overthrow from neighbouring Hungary — Budapest and Szeged.

In recent weeks, several Serbs travelled to the Ukraine. Indeed, one of the leaders from Belgrade, Alaska, travelled to the Ukraine. Indeed, one of the leaders from Belgrade, Alaska, travelled to the Ukraine.

websites are the young activists' weapons. Irony and street comedy mocking the regime have been hugely successful in puncturing public fear and enraging the powerful.

Last year, before becoming president in Georgia, the US-educated Mr Saakashvili travelled from Tbilisi to Belgrade to be coached in the techniques of mass defiance.

meaning high time. Otpor also had a potent, simple slogan that appeared everywhere in Serbia in 2000 — the two words "gotovje", a reference to Milosevic. A logo of a black-and-white clenched fist completed the masterful marketing.